

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023*

**Statement on the Death of Harry Belafonte**

*April 25, 2023*

Jill and I are saddened by the passing of a groundbreaking American who used his talent, his fame, and his voice to help redeem the soul of our Nation.

Harry Belafonte was born to Caribbean parents in Harlem, New York, on March 1, 1927, when segregation was the order of American society. To our Nation's benefit, Harry never accepted those false narratives and unjust boundaries. He dedicated his entire life to breaking barriers and bridging divides.

As a young man motivated to find his purpose, he became mesmerized by theater when he saw a performance of the American Negro Theater in Manhattan. As one of America's original breakthrough singers and performers, he would go on to garner a storehouse of firsts: the first Black matinee idol, the first recording artist to sell over a million records, the first Black male Broadway actor to win a Tony award, the first Black producer to win an Emmy award, and one of the highest paid entertainers of his time, among other accolades.

But he used his fame and fortune for the public good throughout his extraordinary career. He became a powerful ally of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other giants of the civil rights movement. He raised money and donated resources to post bail for activists jailed for acts of civil disobedience. He provided the critical funds to launch the Freedom Rides.

He lobbied against apartheid in South Africa, for the release of Nelson Mandela and was one of the visionaries behind "We Are the World," an innovative record released to raise millions of dollars to support humanitarian aid in Sudan and Ethiopia. For these and other humanitarian and artistic efforts he was conferred with a Kennedy Center Honor, the National Medal of the Arts, and a Grammy lifetime achievement award.

Harry Belafonte's accomplishments are legendary and his legacy of outspoken advocacy, compassion, and respect for human dignity will endure. He will be remembered as a great American.

We send our deepest condolences to his family and legions of admirers across the country and the world.

*Categories:* Statements by the President : Harry Belafonte, death.

*Names:* Belafonte, Harry; Biden, Jill T.

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